

The Influence of the Portrayal of *Godfatherism* in Nollywood Films on Nigerian Voter Behavior

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Abstract

Politics in Nigeria is considered as a huge investment; and so the political lords and *godfathers*, financially sponsor their political ‘godsons’ to political positions so as to be directly or indirectly in control of power. Since this trend started, people in political positions are no longer accountable to the citizenry, rather to their sponsors. Corruption becomes a direct consequence of *godfatherism*. Public enlightenment therefore, is required to create the awareness needed to understand how *godfatherism* influences political elections. This study is hinged on the Social Cognitive Theory and adopted survey methodology with questionnaire as instrument to examine the role Nigerian Film industry as an agent of public enlightenment plays in sensitizing the public on the dangers of politics of *godfatherism*. Do Nigerian Films portray politics of *godfatherism*? Is the portrayal consistent with the reality on ground? What is the direction of the portrayal? Is the audience able to identify the subject matter as to help them in making wise decision during political elections? These are the questions this study seeks to provide answers to.

Key words: Film, Politics, Godfatherism, Nollywood, Portrayal, Voter

1. Introduction

Politics is the allocation of resources within a nation-state (Nwosu, 2003). It is the determination of how public resources are to be administered within a polity (Olisa, 2000). It means that the various activities of politicians, within a political environment, deal with how the common-will should be harnessed in addressing societal situations. The import, therefore, is the consideration of politics as an investment in the business of public policy administration and governance.

The belief that politics is concerned with how public mandate is to be acquired, in order to control government makes persons organize themselves along lines of mutual interest as political parties. The essence is to provide identifiable platforms through which political thoughts and expressions can become articulated. The parties, therefore, produce contestants, whose conflicting interest give rise to the political drama of campaigns, intrigues and outright competition. It is the contest in political competitions that culminate into the façade known as election.

Politicians use persuasive communication to canvass an issue or a cause. They use a specific communication channel to reach a particular target audience with a pre-determined process message, expected to influence voter behavior. The nature of the desired message and its target audience determine to a large extent, the most apt communication medium to be employed in harassing the psyche of voters. This is where the film as audio-visual communication medium plays an invaluable role in information sharing and process message delivery. The film as a dramatic presentation on the election stage (Owuamalam, 2007), therefore, provides characters whose roles and performance facilitate message actualization with expected audience reaction which translates to voter behavior where political elections become the theme of the film.

The use of characters in political films shows that a hierarchy is expected in the classification of artistes performing political roles. The filmic scenario produces political combatants as protagonist and antagonist with specific interest either as intra-play or inter-play activities. It is how the leaders relate with the led, as characters in the film, that helps to provide the interpretation which the film audience need to understand a film. Role performance, therefore, facilitates an understanding of the essence of the film, as a communication experience, within the electronic classification of mass communication.

1.1.1 Conceptual Discussion

The transformation of aspiration to actuality suggests that specific actions are required for such a transmutation. The individual needs sponsors who understand the essence of the aspiration and are capable of assisting in the goal realization as indicated. The political terrain is awash with such persons who control political influence, as a stake-holder, in deciding the chance of a political aspiration by other persons. Such a person, within the political context is the *godfather*, as known and understood, like in the Nigerian situation. Ezeani (2009) believes that such persons are either there to determine who get what or they perform specific actions to install somebody in a specific position of political authority.

The political *godfather* is a notable player in resource control needed in the game of politics. Such a person qualifies to be so recognized through the provision of resources needed to prosecute an election. It is the influence wielded by the *godfather* within the political environment that distorts political permutations as would have ordinarily expected. The consequences is that only the 'son' or 'daughter' of the *godfather* survives political intrigues or emerges victorious in elections within the *godfather's* sphere of political influence. *Godfatherism*, therefore, compel scions and political neophyte to seek the blessings of 'political grand masters', if they most become relevant as politicians or hope to secure any significant political position in society.

In Nigerian political environment, *godfatherism* exists although its influence seems to be declining in recent elections. Some *godsons* who successfully clinch to power through the mechanization of a *godfather* had been converted to mere waste pipes, through which state resources were siphoned to service the interest of their mentors. The scenario portrays a situation where the successful *god children* become the established agents of the *godfather* for the purpose of public administration, as directed by the political master. Uwhejevwe-Togbola, (2012) believes that over-lordship and desire to control government, makes the *godfather* seek to direct role performance in public administration, within a political entity. Corruption becomes a direct consequence of *godfatherism*. Public enlightenment therefore, is required to create the awareness needed to understand how *godfatherism* influences political elections and influence peoples attitude and behavior in the political environment.

Political events, characteristics of political actors and political situations are shaped by the information made available to the people by the mass media to which they are exposed directly or indirectly to (Soroka, 2003); and they influence audiences' overall perception of issue of importance or create images of particular issues, like *godfatherism*. Reception of such issues will also help in understanding issues as they arise and further a better mutual understanding between individuals and groups within a society (Graber, 2004).

The media of film/motion picture/movie as a significant medium of mass communication are becoming the major market place of ideas in the world today. It has touched and dealt with every segment and have reached every audience (Bittner, 1989). Opubor quoted in Akaer and Onah (2013) notes;

Of all the media of mass communication, the motion picture has perhaps the most universal appeal and impact. If properly conceived and executed, a film can rise above the limitations of language and cultural barriers by the power of its visual images, its use of music and sound effects can succeed in conveying much the same message to audiences of heterogeneous backgrounds.

Nigerian film industry, known as Nollywood, which existed for more than two decades, has positioned itself to inform its audience, which impacts Nigeria and beyond. Their films are produced to serve a specific objective. The theme in the films determines how artistic performance creates the aesthetics appreciation which provides the template for the assessment of the impact of the film. One of such influences to be determined is how the portrayal of *godfatherism* influences affects voter decision in elections, particularly within Nigerian context in the film.

1.1.2 Situational Review

This presentation used the case of Governor Chris Ngige Vs Chris Uba in Anambra state of Nigeria to discuss the consequences of *godfatherism* in politic. The essence is to show who a *godfather* is and how *godfatherism* operates in the said Anambra political scenario. The situational case scenario is articulated as follow:

1.13 The case of Senator Chris Ngige Vs Chris Uba

In the Nigerian state of Anambra, in 2003, Dr Chris Nwabueze Ngige was elected governor of Anambra State with the strong backing of Chris Uba, whose brother is Andy Uba, one of former president Obasanjo's closest advisers. The two fell out over a lucrative contract that Chris Uba had hoped would be a reward for his support. Chris Uba fought back by trying to unseat the governor.

High Court ordered the withdrawal of the governor's security while a concurrent court said his security should be restored. During the period of the security withdrawal, the governor was exposed to danger. There was news of the bomb explosion at the governor's lodge at Awka the state capital. The news created tension in Anambra State especially in Awka.

The power tussle between them culminated in a deadly riot that rocked the state, in which property worth N35 million (£9.8 billion) were destroyed (Okoli and Omonobi, 2004). Media houses, Deputy Governor's office and government buildings were burnt. Many other public utilities were destroyed and vandalized by militants who were accused of been sponsored by Chris Uba. Governor Ngige on the other hand was also accused by his political opponents of carrying out the attacks, and they were pressing the then President of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to declare a state of emergency in Anambra and remove him from office.

1.2 Statement of Problem

How to make citizens understand the meaning of *godfatherism* in politics is a problem confronting the mass media in Nigeria. It is believed that awareness creation gives rise to understanding, which leads to a reasonable decision making. It becomes necessary to ascertain the effectiveness of films as communication medium for public enlightenment, desire for appreciating political issues, within their contextual environment. It is the derived influence of the film on its audience, like voter behavior within the context of political conjectures of *godfathers* as portrayed that this presentation explores.

1.3 Objective of Study

Three objectives were set for the study as;

1. To ascertain if Nollywood home movies portray *godfatherism* as an actuality in the Nigerian political situation.
2. To determine if the thrust of portrayal of *godfatherism* as either positive or negative
3. To understand if the film audience as voters recalled the content of the Nollywood political home movies on *godfatherism* as relevant in providing them with needed information that influenced voting decisions

1.4 Research Questions

Three research questions are to be answered by this study. They are;

1. Do Nollywood home movies portray *godfatherism* as an actuality in the Nigerian political situation?
2. Is the portrayal of *godfatherism* in Nollywood home movies positive or negative?
3. Do the film audience as voters recalled the content of Nollywood political home movies on *godfatherism* as relevant in providing them with needed information that influenced voting decisions?

1.5 Scope of the study

This paper studied home video consumers in Onitsha in Anambra state, Nigeria. Onitsha, like Lagos has several producers and consumers of nollywood films and the commercial nerve centre of the state. It is also populated with politically vibrant persons who watch the Nollywood films.

1.6 Population of Study

Onitsha is made up of two local government areas as Onitsha North and Onitsha South. The population of the city is 562,324 (Office of Federal Statistics, 2010). And so 52,324 forms the population of the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is predicated on the social cognitive theory as apt in capturing the influence of the portrayal of *godfatherism* in Nollywood films on Nigerian voter behavior. The theory outlined by Bandura (1977) provides an insight into models watched as characters “in dramatic presentations on the big and small screen”, influence viewers’ attitude in reacting to similar real-life situations. For instance, Miller (2002, P. 24) believes that “social cognitive theory, most concerned with behavioral effects would suggest that depictions of violence could lead to either increase or decrease in violent behavior, depending on whether the behavior of the model was rewarded or punished”. It is the operant conditioning towards reward and punishment of observed characters in the film that define the social learning context.

Viewers of the film are exposed to “reinforcement” as the “primary construct in the operant form of learning” (Baranowski, Perry and Parcel, 1997, P. 161). It works through an inhibitory effect that portrays punishment and disinhibitory effect that supports reward for an observed behavior. The theory, therefore, explains how *godchildren* are either rewarded or punished by *godfathers* in Nollywood films, as the process message for the viewers. It is the nature of model impact on voter behavior that is measured in this study.

2.1 Reviewed Empirical Studies

Every film is a story that thrives on people’s life’s challenges and possible resolutions. It exhibits, plays upon, mirrors, recreates and retells the stories of the society in which it subsists (Farinde, 2008; Awodiya and Amobi, 2014), from the point of view of people’s worldviews and context (Uwah, 2013). Nollywood films constantly address the problems of Nigerian society through a whole repertoire of genres and symbolic complexes. Their themes mainly center on the moral dilemmas facing Nigerian society such as poor infrastructural development, corruption, human rituals, political instability, and other vices that the society frowns at.

Awala (2011) investigated the representations of political corruption in some selected Nigerian video films that have strong political premises with the view of examining with specificity, social themes that have a bearing on how society is ordered. The study found that the portrayal of political corruption in Nigerian video films is largely consistent with social reality; and the audience identifies and associates with the subject matter because the stories are told in a compelling narrative that allows for empathy.

Awodiya and Amobi (2014) analyzed five selected Nollywood films with political thematic content, to determine the extent to which the Nigerian filmmakers’s construction of meanings conforms to the audiences’ interpretations. They confirmed that there is an overlap between the filmmakers and their audiences; both co-create the social communicative reality in which they exist. The filmmakers consciously survey society and translate issues of interest into thematic plot in their films in order to induce social change.

Agina (2013) analyzed a Nigerian 2012 AMAA and AFDA award winning documentary film titled *fuelling poverty*, in order to determine its political, economic, social and cultural context. Though the film was initially construed by some observers as inciting hate speech and intended to incite Nigerians against its government, the study found that the documentary is an audacious reminder of the democratic dispensation of its reckless squandering of public funds. What set out to portray the conflicting narratives that followed the January 1, 2012 fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria by the government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan became a hugely emotive and penetrating depiction of the fuel subsidy scandal.

Conversely, some scholars believe that Nollywood films are grounded in a commercial culture and seem quite indifferent to serving as a corrective measure to the societal ill (Ukadike, 2000, Adeosun, 2011). However, film producers should exercise some social responsibility to the masses by performing their duties in such a way as to demonstrate awareness that they have a stake in what happens to society – stability or confusion, order or anarchy, equity or corruption.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Onitsha, Anambra state, Nigeria. Onitsha is made up of two local government areas - Onitsha North and Onitsha South. The population of the city is 562,324 (Office of Federal Statistics, 2010). The study used the survey method and the questionnaire as the measuring instrument for data collection. 320 adult respondents were purposively selected for the study. The selection was done in such a way that the two local government areas were well represented in the sampling.

4. Results

The results of study are presented, analyzed and discussed below using Likert Scale statistical tool. Three hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents by hand. However, 12 copies of the questionnaire or 3.75% were invalid for this study. It means that 308 copies were valid and used in the study. The details of results are as follows;

Table 1: Comprehensive data analysis

Question		Response					
s/n		SA=5	A=4	UD=2	D=2	SD=1	Mean Value
1	You recalled the content of Nollywood home movies that portray godfatherism	55	133	56	49	15	$\frac{1088}{308}$
		275	532	168	98	15	=3.53
2	Godfatherism in Nollywood home videos is same as in Nigeria	48	116	72	54	18	$\frac{1046}{308}$
		240	464	216	108	18	=3.39
3	Godfatherism in home video shows how politics is in Nigeria	51	112	38	85	22	$\frac{1009}{308}$
		255	448	114	170	22	=3.28
4	Godfatherism is positively presented in the film.	28	98	37	120	25	$\frac{908}{308}$
		140	392	111	240	25	=2.95
5	Godfatherism is negatively presented in the films	30	106	23	118	31	$\frac{910}{308}$
		150	424	69	236	31	= 2.95
6	The film makes you understand what godfatherism means	41	108	65	82	12	$\frac{1008}{308}$
		205	432	195	164	12	=3.27
7	Your decision in elections is influenced by the portrayal of godfatherism in Nollywood home movies	36	116	20	104	32	$\frac{904}{308}$
		180	464	60	208	32	=2.94

The decision point for this study is 3.0 obtained as follows:

$$X = \frac{SA + A + UD + D + SD}{5} = \frac{5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1}{5} = 3.0$$

It means that values less than 3.0 rejects the statement in the questionnaire while those above the decision point, agrees with the statement.

RQ1 Do Nollywood films portray *godfatherism* as it actually exists in Nigeria?

Item 2 in the questionnaire was used in answering above question. The statement posed was: *Godfatherism* as shown on home video is same as in Nigeria. The obtained data were analyzed using the Likert Scale as follow:

The result from the table shows that the concept of *godfatherism* as portrayed in Nollywood films is same as in Nigeria since

$$X = 3.39 > 3.0$$

It means that *godfatherism* as shown on Nollywood films is an actuality in the Nigerian political situation.

Again, item 3 in the questionnaire was used to answer Research Question I as above stated. The result shows that;

$$X = 3.28 > 3.00$$

It means that since the calculated mean value of 3.28 is greater than the decision point value of 3.0, then the study confirmed that the portrayal of *godfatherism* in Nigeria shows how it operates in the Nigerian situation.

RQ2 Is the portrayal of *godfatherism* positive or negative?

Items 4 in the questionnaire were used to answer the above research question. The result from obtained data as analyzed shows that;

$$X = 2.95 < 3.00$$

The result shows that the portrayal of *godfatherism* in the nollywood films is negative in nature. A similar result was obtained when the question was reversed as in item 5 in the questionnaire. The result shows that;

$$X = 2.95 < 3.00$$

The above result further confirmed that the films portrayed *godfatherism* negatively.

RQ3 Do film audience as voters recall the content of nollywood political home movies that portray *godfatherism* as relevant in providing them with needed information that influenced their voting decisions?

Item 1 was first used to know if the Nollywood audience recalled the content of political home movies messages on *godfatherism*. The data show that;

$$X = 3.53 > 3.0$$

The result, using the summation rating scale showed that the calculated mean value of 3.53 was obtained. The result is greater than the decision point value of 3.0. It means that there is likelihood that the voter recalled the content of the films messages, as based on the provided political information on the Nollywood film platforms.

Secondly, item 6 was used to know whether the films made viewers understand the meaning of *godfatherism* in politics. The obtained result shows that;

$$X = 3.27 > 3.0$$

It means that the film was effective in making viewers understand the meaning of *godfatherism* within the context of political life in a polity.

Finally, when asked whether the film content influenced their voting decision in elections, it was found that;

$$X = 3.53 > 3.00$$

It means that the portrayal of *godfatherism* in Nollywood home movies influenced its audience voting decision in elections.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The study found that the concept of *godfatherism* as portrayed in Nollywood films is an actuality in the Nigerian political situation. This corroborates previous studies (Awodiya and Amobi, 2014; Uwah, 2103) that Nollywood films is crucially important in reflecting and mirroring the society's attitude and shaping the attitude. It means that the films are effective in creating political consciousness among the people; they monitor events in the society, and interpret such event. Nollywood films help their audience to understand the meaning of *godfatherism* within the context of political life in a polity. This finding shows the social learning role of the film as a communication medium used for public information and enlightenment. This finding satisfies the first objective of this study.

Also it was found that *godfatherism* was negatively portrayed in the films. *Godfatherism* were never portrayed as commendable approach in politics, particularly, the Nigerian situation it mirrors; rather it was portrayed as an attitude that always has a backfiring and boomerang effects on the *godson* if he eventually gets to power; and the society becomes the proverbial "grass that suffers when two elephants fight". This can be seen in Chris Ngige and Chris Uba's case as cited in this study, where the *godfather* (Chris Uba) and *godson* (Chris Ngige) fell apart over a "lucrative" public project which the godfather believed should be part of his compensation for financially sponsored his godson into political position. This culminated to crises that rocked the state for weeks, where public utilities were destroyed.

Recall capability frees content from becoming transient and ephemeral, since audience of the media remembers them and use them in decision making, thus the research also had interest in ascertaining if the Nollywood audience as voters recalled the Nollywood political messages on godfatherism as to influence their voting decision. The study showed that they recalled the messages and the messages in turn influenced their voting decision in elections. This may not be unconnected with the audio-visual nature of film medium which according to Akaaer and Onah (2013) has the most universal appeal and impact among all the media of mass communication. Its audience participate with apt attention and this enables them to identify the subject matter which will likely lead to a reasonable decision making.

This explains why 'rigging' and various other electoral frauds are committed to satisfy the *godfather's* interest since his actions are not endorsed by the voters who have been exposed to the influence of *godfatherism* in politics via film medium. This goes to support Miller (2002, P. 24) assertion that whether the portrayal of behaviour in films will have positive or negative effects on the audience behaviour is dependent on whether the behaviour of the model was rewarded or punished". This is a direct consequence of the impact of the films on voter behavior.

5. Conclusion

The portrayal of *godfatherism* in Nollywood films is a pre-determined attempt by film producers to provide communication content which derides unethical practices in politics. It shows how the film medium brings vividly, the nuances of politicians as they try to control power and state resources. It is probably the nefarious consequences of *godfatherism* that the films bring to the fore, in order to show how inordinate political ambitions determine role performance in politics.

The study shows that film can be a veritable avenue for dealing with contentious political situations. It shows what concepts like *godfatherism* means in order for voters and the electorate to beware and take appropriate remedial actions.

It is understandable that Nollywood is a profit making venture, but they should strive to strike a balance between its profit maximization and exercising its social responsibility to the society – public enlightenment, and the desire for appreciation and sustaining democratic dispensation within their contextual environment.

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